



Press Clips

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FROM THE OC REGISTER**Jaime Barria pitches Angels to victory in his major league debut**

By Jeff Fletcher

ARLINGTON, Texas — Jaime Barría gave the Angels reason to be optimistic they finally have the pitching depth to withstand their injuries.

Barría gave up one run in five innings in his major league debut, helping the Angels to a 7-2 victory over the Texas Rangers on Wednesday night.

The Angels improved to 10-3, continuing to match the 1982 and 1979 teams for the best start in franchise history. They completed a three-game sweep of the Rangers, outscoring them 26-6.

For what it's worth, the Angels are alone in first place, the first time since 2015 they've been in that position outside of the season's first 10 games.

Their hopes for hanging with the favored Houston Astros all season will largely hinge on the starting rotation, which has already deteriorated to the point that the 21-year-old Barría got the call for a one-game cameo.

He was optioned back to Triple-A after the game, making room for Nick Tropeano to join the rotation to start on Thursday in Kansas City. It will be Tropeano's first big league game since undergoing Tommy John surgery in August 2016.

Barría said he understood his short stay in the big leagues.

"Right now I have to go back to Triple-A and show I belong (in the major leagues)," he said through an interpreter.

One of the Angels' top pitching prospects, Barría was expected to contribute to the big league team at some point this season, but certainly not this soon.

The Angels reached his name on their depth chart because Andrew Heaney, who will be activated to start on Friday, was on the disabled list, along with JC Ramírez and Matt Shoemaker. Parker Bridwell was unavailable to be recalled because he was optioned less than 10 days earlier.

Barría walked two in a 20-pitch first inning, but after that he had little trouble getting through the next four innings. Throwing his fastball at 91-92 mph and mixing in deceptive changeups, Barría gave up only one hit. Ryan Rua hit a homer to lead off the third.

Barría needed 71 pitches to get through five innings, which was enough to make him the first Angels starter to get a victory in his major league debut since Sean O'Sullivan in June 2009.

"Jaime pitched well," Manager Mike Scioscia said. "We felt he was part of our depth chart, and he showed it tonight. That's important."

The Angels started the scoring with two runs in the second, on back-to-back two-out RBI hits by Shohei Ohtani and René Rivera.

For Ohtani, the hit off Matt Moore was his first in five big league at-bats against a lefty. He struck out in his next time against Moore, and walked against left-handed reliever Jake Diekman. In between, he hit a soft lineout against right-hander Matt Bush.

Ohtani's night included one odd sequence. After his eighth-inning walk, he was picked off by Chris Martin, his former teammate with the Nippon Ham Fighters. Upon review, the call was overturned. But then a few pitches later, Ohtani was picked off again, and this one stood.

Keynan Middleton, who is now clearly Scioscia's preferred closer, picked up a five-out save. He struck out Joey Gallo with a 99 mph fastball to end the eighth. After the Angels added two insurance runs on Kole Calhoun's third hit of the game, Middleton got the final three outs in the ninth.

Shohei Ohtani hoping Angels will use him more

By Tomoya Shimura

ARLINGTON, Texas — Shohei Ohtani is ready for more.

Ohtani has pitched twice and been the designated hitter five times in the Angels' first 13 games. After Wednesday's game, Ohtani said he understands the team's caution with him, but he's hoping to push the envelope.

"I talk to the medical staff every day and they see how I'm doing, my strength level, to see if I can play that day," Ohtani said through his interpreter. "It's the beginning of the season so I think they are being pretty careful with me right now.

"Once the season gets tougher and the schedule gets tougher throughout the summer, hopefully I can make them want to play me more. I would like to play more. If not, that's what it is. I have to follow what they have to say."

Manager Mike Scioscia has repeatedly said the Angels will err on the side of caution when it comes to using the 23-year-old rookie. So far, the only strict rules have been that Ohtani won't start at DH on the days immediately before or after he pitches, which is how he was mostly used in Japan.

There have been two games when Ohtani has been available to hit, but did not start, both when the opponents started left-handed pitchers. Scioscia said the Angels aren't platooning Ohtani. He started against a lefty on Wednesday night. He went 1 for 2 against lefty starter Matt Moore and walked against lefty reliever Jake Diekman.

The Kansas City Royals are starting right-handers in the first three games this weekend. Ohtani is expected to be in the lineup on Thursday and Friday.

As for his pitching schedule, Ohtani's third start of the season is scheduled for Sunday, which will be on six days rest. He has pitched on at least six days rest every time since his second outing of the spring, which was on five days rest.

Scioscia has said that is more flexible, and Ohtani may at some point start on five days rest.

Tests on Matt Shoemaker leave Angels in a holding pattern

By Jeff Fletcher

ARLINGTON, Texas — The Angels are still trying to figure out exactly what is wrong with Matt Shoemaker.

The team announced on Wednesday that recent tests showed “no new findings of nerve irritation.” Shoemaker will continue to undergo treatment, without throwing, and he'll continue to be evaluated.

He had already undergone an MRI that showed no other structural damage.

Shoemaker has been on the disabled list with what's been diagnosed as a strained forearm since last week. He said he felt some discomfort late in his first start of the season, on March 31, and then it got worse over the next 24 hours.

Last year Shoemaker went on the disabled list in June with what was called forearm tightness. Shoemaker got as far as a minor league rehab assignment before suffering a setback, which led to a diagnosis of radial nerve compression. He had season-ending surgery to release the radial nerve.

Shoemaker then had no issues throughout spring training and into his first start.

Because he said this year's injury felt similar, the Angels did more nerve tests. He underwent an electromyogram and nerve conduction tests, which provided no further insight to his injury.

The Angels have already had three of their starters land on the disabled list. JC Ramírez has a torn ulnar collateral ligament, with Tommy John surgery suggested. Andrew Heaney, who was out with elbow inflammation, said he's now ready to return as soon as the Angels decide to put him in the rotation.

TOO MUCH RELIEF

The Angels' bullpen had a 2.44 ERA, before Wednesday's game, which is encouraging. The relievers had also combined to pitch 55-1/3 innings, which is not so encouraging. They led the league in relief innings.

“These guys have been very good, but we don't want to see that same pace,” Manager Mike Scioscia said before Wednesday's game. “It's unrealistic to think we can keep using these guys as much as we have. We are on pace to have five guys with 90 appearances. I don't think that's going to work.”

Angels starters did not even average five innings in the first 12 games, with only three quality starts.

"We know we can not maintain the pace we had in the first week, and we don't believe we will," Scioscia said. "We feel we'll start to get that length out of the starters, where we're getting 17, 18, 19 outs consistently, which will take a little pressure off us."

ALSO

Ian Kinsler (groin) came through a pregame workout without issue on Wednesday, Scioscia said. Kinsler is expected to be activated before Thursday's game in Kansas City. He is expected to return to the leadoff spot, with Zack Cozart going back to the middle of the order. ...

Jefry Marte, who had nine hits in his first 21 at-bats, was one of the more pleasant early surprises for the Angels. In 2016, he hit 15 homers in about a half-season worth of plate appearances, with a .790 OPS, but last year he struggled to a .173 average and .576 OPS.. "I think last year was a year he just never felt comfortable at the plate," Scioscia said. "He tried a couple different things and just couldn't get comfortable. He worked very hard in the spring. I think he's back to the comfort level we saw a couple years ago when he was a very productive offensive player."

UP NEXT

Angels (Nick Tropeano, first start of the 2018) at Royals (Ian Kennedy, 1-0, 0.75), Thursday, 5 p.m., Fox Sports West, KLAA (AM 830).

FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES

Angels handily sweep Rangers

By Jeff Miller

As tough as it is to make the big leagues, tougher still can be remaining there.

So, after winning his major league debut, after limiting Texas to one hit over five innings, after helping the Angels to a sweep, Jaime Barria was presented with a game ball and a return ticket to the minors.

"I understood the process," he said after the Angels won 7-2. "It didn't matter what I did today. I knew it was going to happen."

Barria was optioned back to triple-A Salt Lake to make room for Nick Tropeano, who will start Thursday when the Angels open a series in Kansas City.

The move was just the latest in what projects to be a flexible rotation as the Angels deal with injuries and the complexities of accommodating Shohei Ohtani's pitching schedule.

At the same time, they've opened the season 10-3, matching the franchise's best start after 13 games.

In winning three straight here, the Angels outscored the Rangers 26-6 and never trailed.

In fact, since losing Saturday at home to Oakland, they've played 36 innings and have had the lead at the end of 35 of them.

The only time they didn't lead was after the first inning Wednesday, when the score was still 0-0.

So, during this stop, the Angels put Texas in a position where it was constantly looking up its visitors, constantly coming back. Or attempting to come back. And failing to do so. Miserably.

The Angels got three hits and two RBIs from Kole Calhoun, two hits and an RBI from Jefry Marte and an RBI single from Ohtani, who finished one for three with a walk as the designated hitter.

The Rangers started Matt Moore, who since the start of the 2017 season, is 6-18 with a 5.74 ERA.

So, even with the Angels turning to the 21-year-old Barria, this game had the feel of another potential mismatch.

The Angels' No. 7 prospect by MLB Pipeline, Barria had made only one, two-inning appearance since the end of spring training.

Against Texas, he needed 20 pitches, 11 of them balls, to work around back-to-back walks in the first inning.

From there, Barria looked very little like a guy who had made only four starts above double-A before Wednesday.

He gave up a home run to Ryan Rua leading off the third but no other hits in his five innings.

"We felt he was part of our depth," manager Mike Scioscia said. "He showed it tonight."

This occasion was more monumental than it might have appeared on the surface. The Angels hadn't had a starter get the win in his big league debut since June 2009 when Sean O'Sullivan beat San Francisco.

For a team having as much as the Angels are at the moment, this game fittingly featured some late comic relief.

After walking in the eighth, Ohtani nearly was picked off first by Rangers reliever Chris Martin, his former teammate with the Nippon-Ham Fighters. Originally ruled out, the call was overturned in review.

Moments later, Ohtani was picked off by Martin in an almost identical play, Martin's throw barely beating him in the sequel.

"I was just trying to be aggressive," Ohtani said through an interpreter. "I'd never seen him pick off [anyone] that fast with the Fighters. That surprised me."

The Angels have won four games in a row and four series, too, and now go to Kansas City to face a Royals team that is 3-7 and has lost four of its first five home games.

Angels hope to give busy bullpen a break

By Jeff Miller

The Angels' bullpen has been many things this season.

Dependable. Stingy. Resilient.

How about overworked? Well, maybe not yet. But the trend is heading in that direction.

"It would be unrealistic to think that we can keep pitching these guys as much as we have," manager **Mike Scioscia** said. "I don't think that's going to work."

Before Wednesday, the Angels had six relievers who had appeared in at least half of the team's first 12 games.

To understand how aggressive that pace is consider that this franchise never has had a reliever pitch in more than 78 games in a season. That record was set by **Scot Shields** in 2005.

"Definitely concerned," Scioscia said. "It's always a focal point. ... You know how important that bullpen is, not just keeping them healthy but effective."

Through a dozen games, Angels relievers led the American League in innings pitched and were second in earned-run average and batting average against.

The biggest issue has been the lack of innings provided by the rotation. The Angels have only three quality starts, two by rookie **Shohei Ohtani**.

On Wednesday, another rookie, **Jaime Barria**, gave up one hit, a **Ryan Rua** home run, through five innings but was pulled before reaching the minimum requirements of a quality start.

"We know that we cannot maintain the pace that we had the first week," Scioscia said. "We don't believe we'll have to. We feel that we'll start to get that length out of our starters to where we're getting those 17-, 18-, 19-out starts."

Matt Shoemaker has more tests

The update on **Matt Shoemaker** is there isn't much of an update, which isn't great news for the Angels. More testing still has not revealed the source of what the team has called a right forearm strain.

Put on the disabled list retroactive to April 1, Shoemaker underwent tests that didn't show any new nerve irritation. An MRI exam also revealed nothing significantly wrong.

He will continue to receive treatment and have another nerve conduction test in a few weeks.

FROM ANGELS.COM

Angels Barria beats Rangers in MLB debut

By Maria Guardado

ARLINGTON -- The Angels' ailing rotation received a welcome boost on Wednesday night from pitching prospect Jaime Barria, who delivered five strong innings to earn a win in his Major League debut and help his club complete a three-game sweep of the Rangers with a 7-2 victory at Globe Life Park.

Barria, a 21-year-old right-hander, yielded only a solo home run to Ryan Rua while walking three and striking out three, becoming the first Angels starter to pick up a win in his Major League debut since Sean O'Sullivan in 2009. Two-way star Shohei Ohtani, of course, won in his mound debut April 1 vs. the A's.

Barria, who was pitching on three days' rest since his last outing for Triple-A Salt Lake was rained out after two innings, departed after throwing 71 pitches.

"Jaime pitched well," manager Mike Scioscia said. "He got a little bit tired. He hasn't gone that long in a while. But he gave us five strong innings, worked his way out of some trouble, showed all of his pitches and looked good. We thought he was part of our depth and he showed it tonight."

With the win, the Angels improved to 10-3 on the season, tying the Mets for the most victories in the Majors. They are in sole possession of first place in the American League West following the Astros' 9-8 loss to the Twins on Wednesday.

The Rangers fell to 4-10 and will lose Elvis Andrus to the disabled list after the shortstop sustained a fractured right elbow on a 96.9 mph fastball in the ninth inning thrown by reliever Keynan Middleton. Andrus was fitted with a splint and will undergo more tests and a CT scan on Thursday. Those will determine the severity of the injury and if surgery will be needed.

Kole Calhoun finished 3-for-5 with two RBIs, while Jefry Marte added two hits, including his first career triple. The Angels' sizzling offense outscored the Rangers 26-6 over this series.

Barria, ranked the Angels' No. 7 prospect by MLB Pipeline, was tested in the first inning after he issued a pair of walks, but he escaped the jam unscathed and then settled in, stymying Texas' lineup with his effective fastball/changeup combination.

Barria pitched in place of Matt Shoemaker, who is on the disabled list with a right forearm strain and will be shut down for at least a few more weeks as the Angels work to confirm a diagnosis. The Angels have already lost JC Ramirez to a torn ulnar collateral ligament, which is expected to require season-ending Tommy John surgery, forcing them to turn to Barria earlier than expected.

Barria's initial stint with the Angels was short-lived, as he was optioned to Triple-A Salt Lake after the game to clear a roster spot for Nick Tropeano, who will start Thursday's series opener against the Royals at Kauffman Stadium. Barria said he understood the reason behind the move.

"It's part of the process," Barria said in Spanish. "I knew that no matter what I did today, I was going back to Triple-A. I just have to keep working hard and show them that I belong here."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Ohtani delivers vs. lefty: Ohtani, getting the start at designated hitter with the left-hander on the mound, delivered his first hit against a lefty. With runners on first and second and two outs, Ohtani grounded a single into left field off Matt Moore to drive home the Angels' first run. Ohtani was 0-for-4 against left-handers coming into the game. Rene Rivera followed with another RBI single to extend the Angels' lead to 2-0. Ohtani finished 1-for-3 with a walk in his fifth start as the Angels' DH.

Upton catch stops threat: The Rangers, trailing 5-1, had a threat going in the eighth when Nomar Mazara came to the plate with two on and one out against Middleton. Mazara hit a sinking flare to left field and Justin Upton raced in to make a sliding catch just off the ground. Middleton then struck out Joey Gallo with a 99-mph fastball to end the threat. Middleton, who has emerged as Scioscia's preferred closing option, also pitched the ninth to earn a five-out save.

SOUND SMART WITH YOUR FRIENDS

Barria joins Hall of Famer Rod Carew as the only players in Angels history who were born in Panama.

MITEL REPLAY OF THE DAY

Rangers reliever Chris Martin didn't get to pitch to Ohtani, his teammate the past two years in Japan. So

he did the next best thing. He picked him off. Twice. Ohtani walked to lead off the eighth against left-hander Jake Diekman before Martin came in to pitch. With one out and Zack Cozart at the plate, Martin picked off Ohtani at first. The Angels challenged the call and it was overturned after the replay review. Ohtani stayed at first and Cozart went back to hitting. Only Martin fired over to first base and again picked off Ohtani. This time the Angels did not challenge the call.

"It wasn't like really a funny moment or anything," Ohtani said. "He was my teammate, but I was just trying to be aggressive and get to the next base. He was doing his best to try to get me out. I think it was just a natural thing. But I've never seen him pick off that fast with the Fighters, so that surprised me. It's something that I know for next time I face him."

QUOTABLE

"I guess he forgot he had that move." -- *Scioscia, on Ohtani getting picked off by Martin*

"Before the game, I did feel nervous when I was sitting here, but my Latino teammates gave me confidence and told me that it was the same game, just in front of a little bit more people. I carried their advice with me, and when I went to pitch, I wasn't nervous anymore." -- *Barria, on his emotions leading up to his MLB debut*

WHAT'S NEXT

The Angels will head to Kansas City to kick off a four-game series against the Royals on Thursday at 5:15 p.m. PT at Kauffman Stadium. Right-hander Tropeano will oppose Royals righty Ian Kennedy in the series opener and make his season debut for the Angels. Tropeano did not pitch last year after undergoing Tommy John surgery in August 2016. Before the injury, Tropeano logged a 3.56 ERA over 68 1/3 innings for the Angels in 2016. Second baseman Ian Kinsler is expected to be activated off the disabled list on Thursday after missing 11 games with a left adductor strain. The Angels went 1-6 against the Royals in 2017.

Eventful night for Ohtani: 1st hit vs. lefty, pickoff

By Maria Guardado

ARLINGTON -- Shohei Ohtani didn't get to bat against his former Nippon-Ham Fighters teammate Chris Martin on Wednesday night, but that didn't stop the two friends from having a memorable face-off in the eighth inning of the Angels' 7-2 win over the Rangers at Globe Life Park.

After Ohtani reached on a leadoff walk off Rangers reliever Jake Diekman, Martin entered the game and appeared to pick off the speedy Ohtani during an at-bat against Zack Cozart. The Angels challenged the call, and it was overturned after replay review showed that Ohtani got his right hand back on the base ahead of first baseman Joey Gallo's tag.

Martin, who played with Ohtani for two seasons in Japan, resumed his at-bat against Cozart, but he caught Ohtani straying again and promptly threw to first. This time Ohtani was picked off for the second out of the inning, and the Angels didn't bother to challenge the call.

"It wasn't like really a funny moment or anything," Ohtani said via interpreter Ippei Mizuhara. "He was my teammate, but I was just trying to be aggressive and get to the next base. He was doing his best to try to get me out. I think it was just a natural thing. But I've never seen him pick off that fast with the Fighters, so that surprised me. It's something that I know for next time I face him. "

Back in the lineup as the Angels' designated hitter on Wednesday, Ohtani finished 1-for-3 with an RBI and a walk. He collected his first hit against a left-handed pitcher in the second inning, delivering a two-out RBI single off Matt Moore to put the Angels on the board. Entering Wednesday, Ohtani had been 0-for-4 against lefties this season.

Ohtani came up to face Moore again in the fourth with Jefry Marte on third and no outs, but he struck out looking. He later bemoaned his inability to drive in the runner.

"I never felt uncomfortable against lefties," Ohtani said. "But there was one at-bat with a runner on third and less than two outs and I struck out. I couldn't drive that run in. That's an at-bat I need to reflect and think about and try to get better for next time in that situation."

Ohtani lined out to reliever Matt Bush in the sixth before drawing a walk off Diekman, another left-hander, in the eighth. Ohtani is now 8-for-22 (.364) with three home runs and eight RBIs in five games as the Angels' DH. He is scheduled to make his third start on the mound on Sunday in Kansas City.

Ohtani, whose strength levels are assessed daily by the Angels' medical staff, said he feels the balance between his two endeavors has been going well so far, though he admitted that he's hoping to play more often as the season progresses.

"It's the beginning of the season, so I think they're being pretty careful with me right now," Ohtani said. "But once the season gets tougher, the schedule gets tougher throughout the summer, hopefully I can make them want to play me more. I would like to play more. But if not, then that's what it is, I just have to follow what they say."

Tests on Shoemaker's forearm are inconclusive

Angels right-hander will undergo another exam in a few weeks

By Maria Guardado

ARLINGTON -- The Angels are still searching for answers on Matt Shoemaker, whose electromyography and nerve conduction study on his right forearm earlier this week yielded no new findings of nerve irritation, according to a statement released by the club Wednesday.

Shoemaker will undergo a followup nerve conduction exam in a few weeks and remains shut down from throwing. The 31-year-old right-hander landed on the disabled list with a forearm strain on April 3 after experiencing discomfort during his season debut against the A's on March 31.

Shoemaker also dealt with a forearm issue last year, which cost him more than half the season and required season-ending surgery to release the compressed radial nerve in his arm. There is no timetable for his return as the Angels continue to work to determine a diagnosis.

The Angels have already lost fellow starter JC Ramirez to a torn ulnar collateral ligament in his right elbow. Ramirez is expected to undergo Tommy John surgery and miss the rest of the 2018 season.

Jaime Barria, the Angels' No. 7 prospect, according to MLB Pipeline, pitched in Shoemaker's place on Wednesday night in his MLB debut against the Rangers. The Angels have already used seven starting pitchers through their first 13 games of the season, tying the franchise record they set in 2001.

Busy bullpen

Compounding the Angels' rotation injuries is the fact that their healthy starters have so far struggled to get deep into games on a consistent basis, leaving the bullpen to shoulder a heavy workload. Entering Wednesday, the Angels' bullpen led the American League with 55 1/3 innings and ranked second with a 2.44 ERA.

Manager Mike Scioscia acknowledged Wednesday that that volume of innings is unsustainable for the club's relievers.

"We know that we cannot maintain the pace that we've had the first week," Scioscia said. "We don't believe we'll have to. We feel that we're going to start to get that length out of our starters to where we're getting into that 17-, 18-, 19-out consistent start, which will take a little pressure off us having to finish games."

Martin, Ohtani catch up

The Rangers-Angels series has allowed Texas reliever Chris Martin to have a chance to speak with one of his former Nippon-Ham Fighters teammates. Martin became good friends with two-way player Shohei Ohtani while playing for the Fighters the past two seasons in Japan, and they have had a couple of conversations while the Angels have been in town.

"We were teammates for two years; we talked as much as we could and learned from each other," Martin said. "He was asking questions all the time because he was set on coming over here. Looks like

he is having a good time. He is enjoying our culture and how the players are welcoming him into the clubhouse."

Martin said he has no doubts Ohtani will be successful in the Major Leagues.

"He has a lot of tools, he's driven, and he's ready to take on this challenge," Martin said. "It's great for baseball: Having a guy who pitches and throws 100 [mph], and in BP hits 500-foot home runs. It's always fun to watch, no matter who it is. His mindset is to be the best player he can be."

Leadoff man to return

The Angels are expecting to activate second baseman Ian Kinsler (left adductor strain) off the disabled list on Thursday. Kinsler will likely return to the top of the order, with Zack Cozart slotting back in the middle of the lineup.

FROM THE ATHLETIC

How rare is Shohei Ohtani? His next opponent, the Royals, have an idea

By Rustin Dodd

KANSAS CITY — Sitting at his locker stall, Royals starter Jason Hammel pondered the question for a moment. He had an unexpected answer.

"Lester," he said. "Honestly."

OK, let me explain. I had stumbled over to Hammel's locker this week with a very specific question. The Royals are set to face the Los Angeles Angels this weekend in a four-game series at Kauffman Stadium. The club will become the latest team to face off against Shohei Ohtani, the two-way Japanese phenom who spent his first weeks in the majors laying waste to the best baseball league in the world. He had opened his career by hitting three homers in five games, batting .368 with a .400 on-base percentage as a designated hitter — *and* notching a 2-0 record as a pitcher while striking out 18 batters in 13 innings. He will put both skills on display this weekend.

So, yes. The upcoming matchup with Ohtani — he's slated to start on Sunday afternoon — left me a little bit curious. The 23-year-old rookie has made it look so effortless, the 100 mph fastballs, the majestic home runs, the daily focus, that I kept wondering: Have we been missing out on two-way players in America? Could other players, even to a lesser degree, have succeeded in the majors as both a hitter and a pitcher?

With a clubhouse of major-league players in front of me, I went searching for an answer. I started with Hammel, the 13-year veteran who has played for six different teams, won a World Series with the 2016 Cubs and settled into a role in the back end of the Royals' rotation.

"OK, here's the question," I began.

The first name that Hammel thought of was Jason Vargas. This was not too surprising. Vargas, the former Royals starter who signed with the Mets this offseason, was a standout hitter at Long Beach State and considered pursuing a professional career as a position player before teams convinced him that his future was on the mound.

Hammel played with Vargas for just one season. They became golf buddies on days between starts. And, after watching him handle a bat, Hammel came away impressed.

"Good enough athlete," Hammel said. "He also hit really well in college."

It was Hammel's second answer, however, that was a little outside the box. In 2015 and 2016 in Chicago, he had shared a rotation with Jon Lester. He had watched Lester's work habits. He witnessed his swing. He knew Lester's numbers at the plate have been awful — he's batted just .083 in 260 plate appearances — but he still wondered. If Lester had tried to hit, Hammel reasoned, he would be good.

"It's kind of funny because he owns the futility record for hitting," Hammel said. "But Lester, if he was to hit every day, I think he would be a pretty good hitter. He's got a really, really nice compact swing. He's strong. And when he works at something, it's to perfect it. I honestly think he could be a pretty good hitter — if given the chance."

The *chance*. Yes, that is the operative word. So many young baseball players in the Americas are funneled into one specific role. They can hit, or they can pitch, but they must choose one. And the decision often comes before professional baseball.

But what if the culture was different? Could there be another Ohtani in the future? Here are the results from my quest:

Whit Merrifield, second baseman

At first, Merrifield was skeptical. All professional baseball players are talented, he said. Almost every great position player pitched when he was younger. But could they actually pull that off beyond high school or college? "I don't know," he said.

Then, he realized he'd forgotten the obvious choice. Merrifield, 29, grew up in North Carolina, playing travel baseball against Giants ace Madison Bumgarner. They were in the same class. They dueled each summer.

Bumgarner was the best player in the state, Merrifield said, but he was more than just the most imposing presence on the mound. He was also the best prep hitter.

"I bet Bumgarner could do it," Merrifield said. "He was the best hitter in North Carolina in my grade. He got to pro ball, and he had to shut it down a little bit. But I bet if he could have kept hitting throughout [the minors], he could have done that pretty easily. Obviously, you see what he does now. He's the best hitting pitcher in the big leagues. If he was on an AL team getting to DH every three days, I bet he could do it."

Royals manager Ned Yost

Sitting in his office on Wednesday morning, Yost concurred with Merrifield's choice. If Bumgarner was pitching in the American League, he said, some team could consider using him as a designated hitter. Sure, you would worry about injury. You would worry about fatigue and taking away his dominance as a pitcher. But from a tools perspective, you would consider it.

"I think they might," he said. "He swings it pretty good."

Yost, in fact, has a rare perspective on the topic. When he managed the Brewers in 2003-04, he utilized Brooks Kieschnick, a former two-way college star at Texas, as a relief pitcher, designated hitter and occasional outfielder.

"We would bring him in to pitch in situations where we would need a pinch-hitter the next inning," Yost said.

The role, of course, was a bit of a novelty, and it's time was fleeting. Fifteen years later, Yost never found another Kieschnick.

"I had a lot of [pitchers] that thought they could hit," Yost said, "but they couldn't."

Brian Flynn, reliever

In most big-league clubhouses, every pitcher has a story about hitting bombs in high school or starring at shortstop. Former Royals starter Zack Greinke once lectured Alex Gordon on the finer points of hitting. In those days, Greinke dreamed of playing every day.

And then, there is Royals reliever Brian Flynn.

"I haven't hit since eighth grade," he said. "I got DH'd for right out of the gate. I was already like 6-foot-6. They were like, 'You made the team, but you're just going to focus on pitching.'"

Flynn laughed as he told the story. He attended Owasso High School in Owasso, Okla., a big-school powerhouse. The baseball program has produced college standouts and future major leaguers, so the

story could be worse. Yet as Flynn watched Ohtani during the first weeks of the season, he thought back to his high school days. Man, he thought, hitting is hard.

“You’ve got pitchers who can hit and consistently put the ball in play,” Flynn said, “but they never barrel it like he’s doing. He’s barreling singles.”

As Flynn stood inside the clubhouse, I followed up with a simple question: If you were going to do both, I asked, it’d be easier for a pitcher to use hitting as a side gig, rather than the other way around, right?

Flynn nodded in agreement.

A few years ago, he played in the minors with Brett Eibner, a former two-way star at Arkansas. The Royals drafted Eibner as an outfielder. He spent years trying to stick in the major leagues as an outfielder before recently pondering a second career as a pitcher. Flynn wondered about all the years off.

“Just the development and the strategy,” he said, “and the game plans that you get in the minor leagues. I think it would be really hard to go in that direction. It would just be hard to pick up the pitch sequencing, reading hitters.

“But it’s the old pitcher-hitter debate: We all think our jobs are harder.”

Nate Karns, starting pitcher

After spending close to 20 minutes on my search on Wednesday morning, I walked over to Karns. He had a good story, he said. When he was in the minor leagues, he spent some days with former major-league pitcher and outfielder Rick Ankiel, who was on a rehab assignment at the low-A level.

By this point, Ankiel had already made it as a pitcher with the Cardinals, flamed out, and rejuvenated his career as an outfielder and hitter. As Ankiel sat in the minor-league dugout, Karns saw something strange.

“We’re there, and he’s able to sit there with the pitchers,” Karns said. “This guy is playing center field, and he’s helping out our starting pitcher and at the same time helping out our outfielders.

“It brings you back to like high school ball almost.”

I mentioned the culture to Karns, the idea that a player like Ankiel would have never received the opportunity to pursue both hitting and pitching at the same time. He nodded.

“You could say that there’s probably more guys that could have done it to a certain point,” he said. “I don’t know if they could have gotten to the top level.”

Karns mentioned Brendan McKay, a budding two-way prospect for the Rays. He mentioned Hunter Greene, the former high school shortstop and pitcher who was drafted No. 2 overall last year and has since concentrated on pitching in the Reds' minor-league system.

"It's one of those things where it's a job," Karns said. "Some people look at it like: What is the best way for you to get the major leagues? And you've got to focus on your priorities at that point. But I would love to see the door to stay a little wider for guys that could potentially do that. But once again, you've got to understand it's hard enough to get to the big leagues doing one thing. So, you want to split up your time and your energy."

It was a good point, and it underscored the special talent of Ohtani. At any point in his career, he could have opted to do one thing. He could have focused his energies on pitching, or put all his time into hitting. But he preferred the challenge of both. Maybe there can be only one.

"There's guys that definitely have the tools to do it," Karns said, "but could they maintain it? I would love to see it.

"I have a homer in the show. I think I can hit. But I'm not going to sit there and be knocking on anyone's door saying, 'Hey, let me swing it a little bit.' But it's fun. It brings you back to how you used to play when you were a kid."

FROM MLB.COM

AL West: The X-factor player for each team

By Richard Justice

On Opening Day, four of the five American League West teams -- the Astros, Angels, Mariners and Rangers -- saw a reasonable path to the postseason. Other than the Astros, every team also had a significant question or two.

Did the Angels and Rangers have enough starting pitching? Could the Mariners keep their core players on the field and get **Felix Hernandez** back to pitching at a high level? The Athletics? That's complicated. They were competitive down the stretch last season (31-28), and so it was easy to envision them turning a corner in 2018.

Now that we've got two weeks of the regular season in the books, what's the shape of this race? With four of the five teams off Thursday, it seemed like an appropriate time to identify an X-factor on each of the five teams:

Angels

Shohei Ohtani, starting pitcher/designated hitter

Ohtani is the ultimate X-factor. Beyond the production he brings as both a hitter and a pitcher, there's also the energy he generates in the stands and the dugout. In a long season, it would be a mistake to underestimate the impact this kind of thing can have on a team. Players understand that they are watching history being made, and they are as into it as the rest of us.

Astros

Ken Giles, closer

The Astros are a team with virtually no holes -- except possibly at the back of the bullpen. That's the same issue they had during the postseason, and manager AJ Hinch maneuvered around it brilliantly by using starting pitchers in relief roles. This season, Hinch has enough bullpen depth to get by without having a designated closer, and he might be forced to do that with some of Giles' postseason struggles carrying over into a new season. But Hinch would like to get his closer back in the kind of groove he was in during the 2017 regular season, when Giles made good on 34 of 38 save chances and averaged 11.9 strikeouts per nine innings.

Athletics

Kendall Graveman, starting pitcher

Graveman is 27 years old and has pitched in 79 Major League games the past five seasons. This is the year the Athletics hoped the right-hander would take a step forward in his development. So far, that hasn't happened, as Graveman is winless in three starts with a 9.45 ERA. But the A's remain hopeful, emphasizing that he has the talent to succeed at the highest level. With **Sean Manaea** and **Andrew Triggs** pitching well and with **James Kaprielian**, Logan Shore and others on their way back from injuries, Graveman is truly an X-factor.

Mariners

Dee Gordon, center fielder/leadoff hitter

The Mariners believe Gordon's speed and ability to get on base can transform an average offense into an electrifying unit that can get this team over the hump and back into the playoffs. While there are plenty of other questions, the potential to have this kind of impact player at the top of the lineup adds a dimension that few other teams have. He's averaged 61 stolen bases and 98 runs in his three full big league seasons.

Rangers**Big Sexy, starting/relief pitcher**

Bartolo Colon has the potential to do two things the Rangers need badly. First, there's the pitching side of it. This team is desperate for rotation help, and even at 44 years old, he appears to still be able to pitch at a high enough level to help. Second, his contributions to the team's attitude and culture also matter. Young pitchers can learn so much by watching how Colon changes speeds, attacks hitters' weaknesses and keeps his composure in good times and bad. Beyond that, he's good for a few laughs, and that's important for a team that is trying to stay competitive.

FROM MiLB.COM

Prospect Roundup: Games of April 11****Who stayed hot**

Angels RHP Griffin Canning, Class A Advanced Inland Empire: 4 2/3 IP, 0 R, 3 H, 1 BB, 6 K --A second-round pick out of UCLA last June, the Angels held Canning back from making his pro debut until this spring. He's proven to be worth the wait, having tossed 8 2/3 scoreless innings while fanning 12 in his first two starts for the 66ers. With a low-90s fastball, plus changeup and two average breaking balls, the right-hander, who turns 22 next month, has the feel for pitching to move quickly through the Angels farm system.

***Article cut to only include Angels-related material.*

FROM THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Ohtani RBI and pickoff in Angels' 7-2 win for sweep at Texas

ARLINGTON, Texas -- Shohei Ohtani never saw such a quick pickoff move by Chris Martin when they were teammates in Japan.

Ohtani had an RBI single in the second inning that put the Los Angeles Angels ahead to stay, but was picked off first base in the eighth by his former teammate in a 7-2 victory Wednesday night over the Texas Rangers

"It wasn't like really a funny moment or anything," Ohtani said through his interpreter. "I've never seen him pick off that fast with the Fighters, so that surprised me, but something that I know for the next time I'm on base against him."

Ohtani was in the lineup for the first time since homering in each of his three starts as designated hitter last week. The 23-year-old rookie two-way sensation put the Angels up 1-0 in the second with his opposite-field single and finished 1 for 3 with a walk.

The Rangers were swept in the three-game series, became the first team in the majors with 10 losses and now will be without their shortstop and No. 3 hitter.

Elvis Andrus has a broken right elbow after being hit by a pitch in the ninth inning. Andrus was clearly in pain when he dropped to the ground.

Dr. Keith Meister, the team's physician, did initial X-rays and an examination at the stadium, and the team said those indicated the probability of a fracture. Andrus' elbow was put in a splint and he will be examined further Thursday, the team's first off day this season.

"Listen, you don't replace guys like this. It's such a huge part of the lineup and on the field defensively," manager Jeff Banister said of Andrus, who at 29 is in his 10th season as their starting shortstop.

Kole Calhoun had three hits, including a two-run single, and scored twice as the Angels improved to 10-3 for the first time since 1982. They are alone atop the AL West after defending World Series champion Houston lost 9-8 earlier Wednesday in Minnesota.

Jaime Barria (1-0) allowed one hit, a home run, over five innings to win his major league debut. The 21-year-old right-hander struck out three, walked three and hit a batter.

Matt Moore (0-3) gave up three runs while allowing seven hits and three walks in five innings as the Rangers lost their fourth straight game.

After Ohtani drew a leadoff walk in the eighth, Martin came on as the fourth Texas pitcher. The two played together with the Hokkaido Nippon Ham Fighters the last two seasons.

Ohtani was called out on an attempted pickoff by Martin, but umpire Bill Miller's call was overturned on a replay challenge. Martin then got Ohtani out on another move to first.

"He got caught in between. ... They almost picked him off the one time, and then the second time picked him off," manager Mike Scioscia said. "I guess he forget (Martin) had that move."

It was Ohtani's first DH start since pitching seven scoreless innings with 12 strikeouts against Oakland on Sunday to improve to 2-0 on the mound. He grounded out as a pinch-hitter Tuesday.

In six games with an at-bat, Ohtani is hitting .364 with three homers and eight RBI. He also took a called third strike Wednesday and was retired leading off the sixth when reliever Matt Bush snagged a comeback liner.

"There was one at-bat with runner on third and less than two outs and I struck out, couldn't drive that run in," Ohtani said. "So that's an at-bat I need to reflect and think about and get better for next at-bat in that situation."

TRAINER'S ROOM

Angels: RHP Matt Shoemaker will continue to undergo treatment without throwing after tests this week showed no new findings of nerve irritation. Shoemaker felt discomfort in his forearm in first start of the season March 31. Shoemaker missed half of last season because of a forearm issue.

YOUNG ANGELS

At 21 years, 267 days old, Barria was the youngest Angels player to make his big league debut since Mike Trout at 19 years, 335 days on July 8, 2011. Barria was optioned to Triple-A Salt Lake City after the game.

OTHER RUNS

Ryan Rua led off the Texas third with his first homer. ... Rene Rivera immediately followed Ohtani in the second with another RBI single. Jefry Marte and Zack Cozart both had run-scoring triples.

UP NEXT

Angels: After completing their first series sweep of the season, the Angels open a four-game series at Kansas City on Thursday night.

Rangers: Texas is the last team in the majors to get a day off after playing 14 consecutive days to start the season. The Rangers will be off Thursday before opening a three-game series Friday night against the Astros.

Rangers' Andrus breaks elbow after getting hit vs Angels

ARLINGTON, Texas (AP) — Texas Rangers shortstop Elvis Andrus broke his right elbow Wednesday night when he was hit by a pitch in the ninth inning of the team's fourth straight loss.

Andrus, the 29-year-old in his 10th season as the Rangers starting shortstop, is likely headed to the disabled list for the first time in his career.

Dr. Keith Meister, the team's physician, did initial X-rays and an examination at the stadium, and the team said after the 7-2 loss to the Los Angeles Angels that those tests indicated the probability of a fracture.

Andrus' elbow was put in a splint and he will be examined further Thursday, the team's first off day this season, to determine the severity of the injury and the course of recovery.

"Listen, you don't replace guys like this. It's such a huge part of the lineup and on the field defensively," Banister said, also mentioning Andrus' leadership.

Andrus was hit by a fastball from hard-throwing reliever Keynan Middleton. He immediately grabbed at his right arm and fell to the ground, appearing to be in significant pain.

Angels star center fielder Mike Trout had been hit by a pitch in the top of the ninth inning.

Asked if Andrus getting hit was retaliatory for that, Banister responded, "It's a fair question for you to ask, but I'm not going to speculate on anything like that."

Andrus is batting .327 with two homers and five RBIs from the third spot in Texas' order.

Since making his debut in 2009, Andrus has played at least 145 games every season. He is coming off two of the best seasons. After hitting .302 in 2016, he was a .297 hitter with career highs of 20 homers and 88 RBIs last season. He had never hit more than eight homers before that.

Second baseman Rougned Odor (left hamstring) and center fielder Delino DeShields (left hand) are both already on the disabled list for the Rangers, the first team in the majors with 10 losses.

Jurickson Profar started the last two games at second base for Odor, and now will likely move to shortstop for Andrus.

Royals fans get first look at the Shohei Ohtani show

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Kansas City fans will get a chance in the next four games to witness what all the international baseball buzz is about when the Royals host the Los Angeles Angels.

The buzz is not about Angels outfielder Mike Trout, who may indeed be the best baseball player on the planet.

Two-way Japanese star Shohei Ohtani is creating the big bold headlines. He will likely be the designated hitter Thursday and/or Friday. On Sunday, Ohtani is listed as the Angels' probable starter.

Ohtani homered in the first three games he started as the designated hitter. He did not hit a home run as the Angels' DH on Wednesday, but he went 1-for-3 with a walk and recorded his eighth RBI of the season. He is hitting .364 with a 1.190 one-base-plus-slugging percentage.

Ohtani is 2-0 in his first two major league starts as a pitcher, taking a no-hitter into the seventh inning in his last start on Sunday against the Oakland Athletics.

No doubt fans will be pouring in, wanting to see Ohtani.

"You're able to throw 100 miles per hour and hit bombs, I think people would be shocked to see that," Mariners outfielder-designated hitter and Japanese superstar Ichiro Suzuki said through an interpreter.

Royals right-hander Ian Kennedy, who is 1-0 with a 0.75 ERA in his first two starts, is the probable starter for the series opener. Kennedy has allowed one run on eight hits with two walks and 13 strikeouts over a dozen innings. He beat the Indians 1-0 in his previous start on Saturday at Cleveland, spacing out four hits, striking out eight and walking none over six innings.

Kennedy has held opposing hitters to a .186 batting average in his first two starts. He has not allowed a home run after yielding 34 last season and 33 in 2017.

He is 1-4 with a 4.42 ERA in seven career games, including six starts, against the Angels. In two starts against the Angels last season, Kennedy was 2-0 with an 0.64 ERA.

The Angels will call up right-hander Nick Tropeano from Triple-A Salt Lake to make Thursday's start. Tropeano, who missed the entire 2017 season after undergoing Tommy John surgery, struck out seven in 3 2/3 scoreless innings on Friday for Salt Lake.

The 27-year-old Tropeano made a career-high 13 starts in 2016, posting a 3-2 record and 3.56 ERA before he was injured. He made his lone career start against Kansas City that year, allowing two runs and eight hits in 5 1/3 innings.

It is anticipated the Angels will activate second baseman Ian Kinsler for the first game against the Royals. Kinsler has been out with an adductor strain.

Kinsler has had success against Kennedy, going 7-for-20 (.350). Albert Pujols, who went to high school and junior college in the Kansas City metropolitan area and is closing in on 3,000 hits, has a 1.167 OPS against Kennedy. He is 5-for-18, but three of the hits are home runs. Trout is 1-for-10 versus Kennedy, while Justin Upton is 5-for-21 (.238).

The Royals lost 4-2 to the Seattle Mariners on Thursday. They dropped the last two games of the series after winning the opener 10-0 on Monday. The Royals are 1-4 at Kauffman Stadium and have lost seven of their first 10 games.

"It's the best I've felt about a 3-and-7 start in my life," Royals manager Ned Yost said. "I just feel good about this team. I feel good about what we have. I just feel we're going to get hot offensively and get on a run and back to a little more even than 3-and-7."

FROM ESPN.COM

Dual threat Shohei Ohtani 'would like to play more' for Angels

As if Shohei Ohtani hasn't made a big-enough impact early in his major league career, he wants to do more.

The dual-purpose phenom has started seven of the Angels' first 13 games -- twice as a pitcher and five times as designated hitter. He has excelled at both, starting 2-0 with a 2.08 ERA in addition to swatting three home runs while posting a .364 batting average.

While the team is resting the 23-year-old rookie on days before and after he pitches, Ohtani is eager to play more.

"I talk to the medical staff every day, and they see how I'm doing, my strength level, to see if I can play that day," Ohtani told reporters via his translator after the Angels' 7-2 win on Wednesday night.

"It's the beginning of the season, so I think they are being pretty careful with me right now. Once the season gets tougher and the schedule gets tougher throughout the summer, hopefully I can make them want to play me more. I would like to play more. If not, that's what it is. I have to follow what they have to say."

Manager Mike Scioscia plans to have Ohtani serve as DH against the Kansas City Royals on Thursday and Friday, with a rest day Saturday before his next scheduled start in the rotation on Sunday.

All of Ohtani's pitching starts this season have come on six days' rest.

Angels' Shohei Ohtani to face lefty starter for first time as DH

Shohei Ohtani is back in the lineup for the Los Angeles Angels on Wednesday night, hitting eighth and serving as the DH against the Rangers lefty Matt Moore.

It will be his first start against a left-hander.

Ohtani has hit home runs in three straight games for the Angels, though he hasn't been in the starting lineup as a hitter since Friday.

On Sunday, he took a perfect game into the seventh inning against Oakland.

He didn't play Monday and grounded out as a pinch hitter Tuesday night against Bartolo Colon as Los Angeles manager Mike Scioscia stuck to his plan of carefully monitoring the newcomer's workload.

Ohtani's next turn on the mound will be Sunday at Kansas City.

Real or Note: Which hot starts in the standings should you take seriously?

By David Schoenfield

Frigid temperatures have blanketed ballparks across the land, but that hasn't prevented some hot starts. Six teams are 8-3 or better, creating some fun early plot twists to the season. Let's take a quick look at those six clubs.

New York Mets (9-1)

Tuesday: They scored two in the eighth and benefited from shaky Marlins defense with two more in the ninth to win 8-6.

How they're doing it: Noah Syndergaard and Jacob deGrom have started six of the team's 10 games and Jeurys Familia has racked up six saves already.

Hot take: It has been all positives for the Mets. The starters are healthy. Michael Conforto returned sooner than expected from shoulder surgery. The bullpen has been excellent, with former starters Robert Gsellman and Seth Lugo looking like potential weapons down there. There are long-term issues on how much offense they'll get at catcher, first base and shortstop, but manager Mickey Callaway has a lot of depth to work from in the lineup and bullpen.

Gut feeling: They've already increased their odds of winning the division from about 20 percent to 34 percent per FanGraphs, and their projected wins from 84 to 88. I think they stay in the race all season, although it wouldn't surprise me if they look to add rotation help at some point (assuming they keep Gsellman and Lugo in the pen).

Boston Red Sox (9-1)

Tuesday: The anticipated Luis Severino vs. Chris Sale showdown was a letdown as the Red Sox pounded the Yankees 14-1. Mookie Betts went 4-for-4 with a walk, five runs and a grand slam.

How they're doing it: The starting rotation has 1.68 ERA.

Hot take: They should be 10-0, as the only loss was on Opening Day, when they blew a 4-0 lead in the eighth inning against the Rays. It's worth noting that nine of these first 10 games came against the Rays and Marlins. Still, David Price has had two scoreless outings and Rick Porcello has been solid. If you get some bounce back from those two to go with Chris Sale, it's going to be a great rotation.

Gut instinct: I had the Yankees at 99 wins and the Red Sox at 95 to start the season. Given the early 4.5-game lead over the Yankees, it's basically even now in my book (FanGraphs gives the Red Sox a 17 percent advantage to win the division). It's hard not to overreact to Price's great start or Giancarlo Stanton's bad start, but that's why we exercise caution: It's early. The Red Sox and Yankees finish the season with a three-game series at Fenway. That could decide the division.

Pittsburgh Pirates (8-2)

Tuesday: Beat the Cubs 8-5 as they pounded out 12 hits to spoil the Cubs' home opener.

How they're doing it: Offense. They're hitting .286/.357/.462 and averaging 6.6 runs per game (best in the majors).

Hot take: Everybody crushed the Pirates after they traded Andrew McCutchen and then Gerrit Cole, so a good start here was imperative. They're not going to score six-plus runs a game all season, but in watching the Pirates a few times already, the lineup has some depth to it, and Josh Bell, Gregory Polanco and Starling Marte should all be better than they were last season. Pitching depth will be a big issue, but Felipe Vazquez -- the closer formerly known as Felipe Rivero -- gives them an elite late-game ace. Put it this way: If they play .500 the rest of the way, they'd finish 84-78 and based on last year's standings that would put them in the wild-card race.

Gut feeling: Probably not enough pitching depth to stay in the race all season in what looks like a tough division, but if you want to go all-in on a deep sleeper, the Pirates are your team.

Los Angeles Angels (9-3)

Tuesday: Ripped out 18 hits in an 11-1 victory over the Rangers.

How they're doing it: Ohtani fever plus the best slugging percentage in the majors.

Hot take: Shohei Ohtani hasn't been the only one raking and he helps extend the lineup that has played without Ian Kinsler so far after he was hurt on Opening Day. This is a very good defensive team, especially once Kinsler returns, and Ohtani gives them a potential ace-caliber starter. The six-man rotation already has some issues, however, as JC Ramirez is out for the season with Tommy John surgery and Matt Shoemaker is on the DL with a forearm strain. Andrew Heaney could return later this week.

Gut feeling: If they get 50 to 55 starts from Ohtani and Garrett Richards, they'll win the wild card. I'd like to see a bullpen upgrade and I'm not convinced Albert Pujols and Luis Valbuena will give them the offense you want at first base and DH, but Mike Trout's awesomeness covers a lot of weaknesses.

Houston Astros (9-3)

Tuesday: Lost 4-1 to the Twins.

How they're doing it: The rotation has a 1.88 ERA with 88 strikeouts and just five home runs allowed over 70 innings.

Hot take: They've won 75 percent of their games even though the offense hasn't been anything special. One issue to watch: The Astros had the second-lowest strikeout rate in the majors last season, one reason they led the majors in runs. They're at the fifth-highest rate right now, with Derek Fisher, J.D. Davis, Jake Marisnick and Evan Gattis all above 30 percent. Those are all complementary players, but it was lineup depth that made the Astros so tough last season.

Gut feeling: There's no reason to change my prediction of 100-plus wins.

Arizona Diamondbacks (8-3)

Tuesday: Lost 5-4 to the Giants.

How they're doing it: The rotation has picked up from where they left off in 2017, posting a 3.18 ERA with 79 strikeouts in 65 innings.

Hot take: That's right, Paul Goldschmidt hadn't homered until the ninth inning of Tuesday's tough loss. Patrick Corbin had dominated with nine K's through five innings before unraveling in the sixth. Anyway, they're off to a good start even though Goldschmidt is hitting .158, Jake Lamb is on the DL and Alex Avila and Jarrod Dyson are hitting a combined .295. But Corbin's new approach of throwing sliders and more sliders has been effective and Zack Godley has allowed one run in 14 innings.

Gut feeling: I love this rotation and my man Robbie Ray hasn't even put it in gear yet. Health and production from David Peralta and A.J. Pollock are absolutely vital and I'd like see another bat (even off the bench) to help out, but the pitching keeps them close to the Dodgers all season.

FROM THE WASHINGTON POST**'Every day is the craziest': Inside the Japanese press corps tailing Shohei Ohtani**

By Dave Sheinin

Around 2:30 a.m. on April 7, Yuichi Matsushita, a baseball writer for Japan's Kyodo News Service, closed his laptop in the press box of Angel Stadium in Anaheim, Calif., and trudged toward the parking lot. He took note of the fact there was one other Japanese journalist still working, some four hours after the conclusion of that night's Los Angeles Angels-Oakland Athletics game, and took small comfort in the knowledge he hadn't closed down the press box again.

But that comfort was short-lived. There was still the long drive to his Los Angeles-area home, and there would be an alarm going off a few hours later, at 8 a.m., so that he could jump out of bed and start writing — on a tight deadline in Tokyo — his next story about Japanese two-way sensation and Angels superstar Shohei Ohtani.

"I'm so tired," Matsushita said Wednesday, with the 2018 baseball season just two weeks old. "Sometimes, it's too much."

Ohtani's scorching, historic debut in Major League Baseball — he entered Thursday with a 2-0 record and 2.08 ERA in two starts as a pitcher and a .364/.417/.773 slash-line in 24 plate appearances as a hitter — has been a boon for both the Angels, who were in first place in the American League West division, and for baseball fans across Japan, where there is a voracious appetite for news about the Pacific League's 2016 most valuable player and the latest in a long line of Japanese superstars to play in America.

But Ohtani's sizzling start has been a mixed blessing for the pack of Japanese journalists — numbering as many as 120 for his first two starts as a pitcher, and dropping to a core of around 50 for most road games — assigned to document his every move, chronicle his every performance and dissect his every pitch and swing. While they can't help but feel a rush of adrenaline as Ohtani's story explodes, both on these shores and in Japan, sometimes that adrenaline is all the fuel they're running on.

Matsushita, for example, has seen his output swell from two or three stories a day during spring training to seven or eight on the days Ohtani pitches. He has editors breathing down his neck at all hours. He's getting three or four hours of sleep per night. His days and weeks are inextricably tied to the Angels' schedule. He barely sees his wife or dog. He must deal with the rigors of travel, the snarl of southern California traffic and the fear of getting scooped by a rival.

Asked which day has been the craziest so far, Matsushita sighed and said, "I don't know. Every day is the craziest."

It's like being an American baseball writer, except his entire beat is one player.

Ever since Hideo Nomo debuted with the Los Angeles Dodgers in 1995 and ushered in the modern era of Japanese superstars in MLB, the Japanese media has chronicled each players' exploits — Nomo, Ichiro Suzuki, Hideki Matsui and Daisuke Matsuzaka garnering the most attention — with a type of blanket coverage that has no real equivalent in American media.

If Tom Brady or LeBron James or Bryce Harper suddenly decided to play overseas, there likely would be no more than a handful of U.S. media outlets willing to spend the money it would take to cover them full-time. Perhaps the closest American comparison would be Serena Williams or peak-era Tiger Woods — if every day was Wimbledon or the British Open.

"I think the attention from us [on each Japanese player] is the same, but the attention from American people is totally different," said Hideki Okuda, a veteran journalist for Sports Nippon who started on the Nomo beat in 1997 and has been in the U.S. ever since. "When Ichiro came, not many people in the U.S. knew that much about him, but Matsuzaka was bigger, because [he played for] the Boston Red Sox. If you want to compare Ohtani, it's similar to Matsuzaka — but Ohtani can attract even more attention because he is a two-way player."

Okuda's primary assignment in recent years has been pitcher Yu Darvish, which has brought its own set of logistical issues — because when Darvish was traded last summer from the Texas Rangers to the Los Angeles Dodgers, so, in effect, was Okuda. And when Darvish, via free agency, joined the Chicago Cubs in February, so did Okuda.

Asked about the difficulty of covering one player every single day, Okuda said, "I think it's more difficult for one person to cover 25 players, the manager, the GM and everything. I don't think my assignment is more difficult than American reporters'. Sometimes I feel like I want to cover everybody, but I have to write what the Japanese people are interested in. Japanese people love baseball, but they're interested mainly in Japanese players."

When the Angels signed Ohtani in December — ending a mad scramble among big league teams for arguably the most coveted foreign player in history — they got more than a dual-threat pitcher and hitter. They got an international marketing and media sensation, an athlete pegged as the "Babe Ruth of Japan." They got an influx of hundreds of media credential requests from Japanese outlets.

And they got an impending logistical nightmare — one that would pit the sheer size and requirements of the Japanese media and the team's own desire to tell its story to a new audience against the limitations of physical space and the need to protect a 23-year-old rookie whose transition to America was going to be difficult enough already.

The job of navigating that nightmare has fallen largely to Angels vice president of communications Tim Mead, who thankfully doesn't view it as such.

“We’re seeing history,” said Mead, who has been with the Angels since 1980. “At some point, whether you’re in the media or someone on the staff of the club, you have to take a step back and say, ‘You know what? This is going to be challenging, but it’s also going to be exciting ... We’re looking at it as: we’re just going to have a larger media contingent. Our following has just grown.”

Almost immediately, the Angels hired Ippei Mizuhara, Ohtani’s longtime friend and interpreter, as their official interpreter, and coaxed Grace McNamee — a Japanese-American who served as the Dodgers’ Japanese media liaison during the Nomo era (1995-98) — out of retirement to fill the same role for them.

They constructed a giant tent beyond the left-field wall at the team’s spring training headquarters in Tempe, Ariz., to accommodate the overflow media. And they organized a meeting of Ohtani and his representatives, Mead and his media-relations staffers, General Manager Billy Eppler and members of the team’s field staff to outline a detailed, specific plan that would govern Ohtani’s media schedule and the access rules for the journalists who would be covering him.

Among the rules: No pregame media sessions. And no one-on-one interviews. Japanese media are encouraged to stay out of the clubhouse, which is typically open to the media several hours before first pitch, unless they have specific questions for Ohtani’s teammates — an edict that provoked few protests from Japanese reporters, since clubhouses in Japan are uniformly closed to the media.

Still, Ohtani meets with the media — first a generally small English-language session, translated by Mizuhara, then one with the larger Japanese contingent — after every game in which he appears. It is a concession not even that biggest American superstars have to make. Even Mike Trout, Ohtani’s superstar teammate and two-time MVP center fielder, typically gets left alone after, say, a 1-for-4 night in a losing effort.

“We have to remember there’s an entire country following his every move,” Mead said of Ohtani “We have a responsibility to help facilitate that, and we recognize that — and Shohei recognizes that.”

Though there are exceptions — including tabloid reporters and photographers who seem obsessed with exposing Ohtani’s dating life, so far with fruitless results — the majority of Japanese journalists are focused, with relentless thoroughness and precision, on the granular details of his every move on a baseball field. If Ohtani throws a bullpen session, they chart each pitch and ask to speak to the bullpen catcher. If he hits in the batting cage, they estimate how many swings produced home runs and ask to speak to the batting-practice pitcher. In their daily briefings with Manager Mike Scioscia, they ask specific questions about Ohtani’s practice schedule, his workload, his performance.

“The way they cover the game is different,” said Los Angeles Times sports columnist Dylan Hernandez, a fluent Japanese speaker whose mother is from Japan and who has traveled there to write long pieces about Ohtani’s background. “We’re more interested in the person. Most of us would say we cover people, not games. They really cover the game. You notice a shift in questions. With us, it’s always, ‘How

did you feel? What did you think about this? What's your relationship like with your dad?' With them, it's more, 'Why did you throw the 2-0 slider? What kind of adjustment did you make on the splitter?'

"The tone they take is different. The way they view it is, these athletes are leaving the country to come over here and represent Japan, and [the reporters] are here to send that news back home: 'This guy is over here to represent you. To make you proud.' "

It's a good thing most in the Japanese media are uninterested in going deep into Ohtani's psyche, because even to them he is a bit of a mystery. Coming up in Japan, because of his youth and inherent shyness, he was largely sheltered from the media. Most of the journalists assigned to him here have had no personal interactions with him other than exchanging pleasantries.

For years, it has been tradition for Japanese players to go to dinner with the media members who cover them a couple of times per season, but it has become clear that won't happen with Ohtani. ("He's not that type of person," said Matsushita, who was the beat writer for Japan's Nippon Ham Fighters when Ohtani played for them.) While Ichiro had some well-known eccentricities and Matsui was always willing to hang out after games, the Japanese media know very little about what makes Ohtani tick.

"In some ways, this is a real difficult job for them," said the Los Angeles Times' Hernandez. "They're dealing with the biggest story for their country — this guy might change baseball, and there would be no bigger story. But at the same time, they're dealing with all these obstacles and restrictions."

Under these difficult conditions, it's no wonder the competition for even the most minute of scoops is constant and intense.

Wataru Serizawa, also of the Kyodo News Service, recalled the frantic chase to spot Ohtani in early December, once word arrived that he would be signing with the Angels. Reporters flocked to Angel Stadium, thinking Ohtani would go there to meet with team officials, and to local hospitals, thinking he might show up to take a physical exam.

Serizawa was staking out the Creative Artists Agency headquarters in Los Angeles, hoping Ohtani would visit there to meet with his agents. "I don't think anyone actually thought we'd find him there," Serizawa said. "But we had to be there to make sure that our rivals didn't either." After a few hours, he had finally given up and called an Uber to catch a ride to Anaheim, when an SUV pulled into the driveway and out of it came Ohtani.

Serizawa came away with one decent picture of Ohtani in the CAA building and one throwaway quote: "There's nothing [I can say]."

But the beast, with its voracious appetite, still needed to be fed, and a single bland and tiny crumb was better than nothing at all. The next morning, the photo and the quote, such as they were, made the

front page of many of the largest newspapers in Japan, a small taste of victory in a long and grueling race.

FROM KYODO NEWS

Baseball: Ohtani starts Angels' win against Rangers with 8th RBI

Shohei Ohtani drove in the opening run Wednesday to earn his eighth RBI of the season and start the Los Angeles Angels' 7-2 win over the Texas Rangers.

Ohtani, who homered in three straight games as the No. 8 batter and designated hitter, went 1-for-3 with a walk as the Angels' lineup worked six Texas pitchers to cap the three-game sweep at Globe Life Park.

After singles from Kole Calhoun and Jefry Marte in the second inning, the 23-year-old Japanese star hit a ground shot to left off Matt Moore (0-3) to bring in Calhoun for the first run of the game.

Rene Rivera's line drive brought in Marte to make it 2-0, but Ohtani was left on base when leadoff batter Zack Cozart popped out to shortstop Elvis Andrus. Panamanian Jaime Barria gave up the only hit in his debut win to Rangers' left fielder Ryan Rua, who homered in the third.

Marte's RBI triple to the right corner sent Calhoun home again in the fourth, but Ohtani struck out looking to Moore in his second at-bat. He lined out to right-hander Matt Bush in the sixth, but the Angels added two after Cozart's RBI triple and a sacrifice fly from Mike Trout.

"I'm not really aware of being weak against left-handed pitchers, but (in my second at-bat) I struck out with no outs and a runner on third, and I definitely wasn't good in the box today," Ohtani said after facing his first lefty as the Angels' DH.

In the eighth, Ohtani drew a walk off left-hander Jake Diekman but a second pickoff attempt at first from right-hander and former Nippon Ham Fighter teammate Chris Martin sent him back to the dugout.

Calhoun hit a two-run RBI single in the ninth to seal the win despite a late Texas run, and the Angels remain the American League West leaders at 10 wins and three losses.

Ohtani, who is 2-0 on the mound, is scheduled to make his next pitching start in Kansas City on Sunday against rookie Eric Skoglund and the Royals.

In other AL games, Yankees' right-hander Masahiro Tanaka (2-1) fanned three and earned his second win as New York beat the Boston Red Sox 10-7.

Tanaka gave up a fifth-inning grand slam to J. D. Martinez at Fenway Park, allowing six runs and seven hits over five innings, but a Giancarlo Stanton two-run triple in the first and a pair of two-run homers from Gary Sanchez helped keep the Yankees ahead.

"More than anything, the team won today," Tanaka said. "They gave me a comfortable lead and I turned it into a close game in the fifth inning. I could have done more."

In the National League, Arizona righty Yoshihisa Hirano took the mound for an inning and gave up a hit and a walk in the Diamondbacks 7-3 win against the San Francisco Giants.

Miami right-hander Junichi Tazawa pitched 1/3 of an inning and gave up two intentional walks as the New York Mets handed the Marlins their third straight loss, 4-1.

FROM THE SCORE

Babe's relatives: 'Ruthian' Ohtani isn't exactly like the Bambino

By Bryan McWilliam

Los Angeles Angels' two-way sensation Shohei Ohtani may have spent the past few years being compared to the legendary Babe Ruth, but the relatives of baseball's greatest player aren't ready to make that comparison just yet.

"He's a long way from being Babe," Ruth's grandson, Ted Stevens, told Josh Peter of USA TODAY Sports. "But let's say he's doing things Ruthian."

The 23-year-old Ohtani is off to a blistering start, hitting a home run in three consecutive games last week and also tossing a one-hit gem Sunday against the Oakland Athletics, which included 12 strikeouts.

Despite the small sample size, comparing the two players has been a topic of conversation because of their rare nature.

Before Ruth focused solely on hitting (en route to 714 career home runs) he was a two-way player who pitched and hit for Boston between 1914-1919. Since then, no player has regularly done the same, which makes Ohtani's story that much more interesting.

But, while the intrigue of Ohtani being the next coming of Ruth continues, Stevens wonders if the youngster will be able to continue both roles because his grandfather wasn't able to.

"Whether he's going to be able to keep that up, he seems to have the ability, which of course is the first thing," Stevens explained. "But even a youngster like himself, I'm not sure how long he can withstand the toll on his body. Babe certainly did it, but he only did it for a couple of years."

Ruth's daughter, Julia Ruth Stevens, agrees with her son. While she believes Ohtani is great for baseball and Japan, she said there will never be another Babe Ruth.

"He was one in a million."

FROM DALLAS NEWS

Remember when the Rangers weren't Arlington's main attraction? Shohei Ohtani reeks of that nostalgia

By Tim Cowlshaw

ARLINGTON -- It was 1972 and the Texas Rangers were brand spanking new, so we drove our used cars -- we were high school juniors -- to the new stadium in Arlington with exuberance. But we almost never arrived thinking of the Rangers.

We went to see Tony Oliva hit for the Twins. We went to see Yaz play left field for the Red Sox.

I went, most of all, to see Oakland's Reggie Jackson muscle up on a home run ball or even twist himself into a pretzel striking out and to watch Vida Blue. Blue was just one year removed from his magical Cy Young/MVP season. And Blue, whose time at the top was brief but who seemed almost impossibly athletic for a pitcher, was who I was thinking about Wednesday when I drove out to the Rangers' suddenly sad second ballpark soon to be tossed aside for a third just to see an even more impossibly athletic pitcher named Shohei Ohtani.

One who performs even when he doesn't pitch. How about that?

Maybe I shouldn't say *just to see*. There was at least mild curiosity about the Rangers' wretched start and the somewhat shocking early attendance totals that suggested a fan base that has been forced to give up early on a bad team this season.

And, yes, the Rangers were lousy, losing to the Angels, 7-2, as they completed the kind of sweep that can energize a visiting bunch. LA outscored the Rangers, 26-6.

To make matters exponentially worse, the Rangers lost Elvis Andrus in the ninth inning on what manager Jeff Banister said appears to be a fractured elbow.

Andrus was hit by a pitch after the Rangers had hit Angels slugger Mike Trout.

In the first two weeks, Banister has lost Rougned Odor, Delino DeShields and now Andrus.

Bad pitching, bad fielding, poor situational hitting and an uncommon rash of injuries -- yes, there are plenty of reasons this trip reminded me of 1972 not excluding the smallish crowds that had been showing up in Arlington this week. But I say that based only on today's standards.

The Rangers could have a significant drop in attendance this year and draw 2 million fans.

Whether the Angels are as good as their first-place 10-3 record remains to be seen, but there's not much doubt about the early returns on Ohtani. A game-changing player the Rangers coveted for years, Ohtani threw 61/3 perfect innings against Oakland on Sunday so Rangers fans won't see what he looks like from the pitcher's mound until at least the next visit.

In his only start of the series, I'm not sure I can give Ohtani all the credit for the increased attendance -- the club drew a little more than 16,000 and 18,000 the first two nights before 20,363 showed up Wednesday -- but there's no doubt right now there is more curiosity about Ohtani than any player in the game.

Hitting home runs in three consecutive games will do that for a pitcher.

FROM FORBES

America Gains As Shohei Ohtani Pursues His Dream

By Stuart Anderson

Before Shohei Ohtani ever played an inning of Japanese professional baseball he decided he wanted to come to America. A Japanese team convinced him to put off his plans, which Ohtani did. But after only two weeks of the 2018 season, baseball writers have started comparing Ohtani to Babe Ruth – and it's not because he stays out late and eats hot dogs in the dugout. Shohei Ohtani is the first major league baseball player in nearly 100 years who is both a world-class hitter and pitcher. At 23, his American journey has just begun.

Shohei Ohtani was born in a rural area of Japan, about three hours from Tokyo. Both parents were athletes. His mother played badminton and his father was a baseball player in a corporate league,

according to a profile by MLB.com's Doug Miller. Radar guns recorded Ohtani's pitches at 99 mph during Japan's national high school baseball tournament – and a professional career became certain.

“He surprised some on Oct. 21, 2012, when he announced that he would forego the opportunity to turn pro in Japan, instead opting to test the waters of Major League Baseball,” writes Miller. “As possible offers from the Dodgers, Rangers, Red Sox and Yankees swirled throughout the rumor mill, the Hokkaido Nippon-Ham Fighters drafted him with the No. 1 overall pick in the 2012 NPB Draft. Then over the course of a month, Nippon-Ham came up with a long-shot strategy that paid off . . . a carefully calculated sales pitch that was grounded in reality and honesty about the travails of rookie-ball players in the States.”

Yet Ohtani was not destined to spend his entire career in Japan. “Ohtani signed, putting his faith in Nippon-Ham, and that faith has been returned now that the club has agreed to post him years earlier than it would be required to,” writes Miller.

Observers note that in his first years, Ohtani's pitching was ahead of his hitting. American baseball executives certainly noticed the pitching when he struck out three major league hitters in the first inning of a 7-inning performance during a 2014 exhibition game in Japan. “Ohtani's pitching stardom was meteoric, but he did not put both sides of his game together until 2016, when he slashed .322/.416/.588 [batting average/on-base percentage/slugging percentage] with 22 homers, while pitching to a 1.86 ERA [earned run average] and striking out 174 batters in 140 innings over 21 games (20 starts),” notes Miller. “That was the year that he became the first player to win the Best Nine award as a pitcher and a hitter (DH), and he was also named Pacific League Most Valuable Player while leading the Fighters to a Japan Series title.”

In late 2017, Shohei Ohtani decided to play in the major leagues at the age of 23. It's clear money was secondary to him. If Ohtani had waited two more years, under major league rules, he could have received many millions of dollars more in salary. Some estimated he could have signed a \$200 million contract. Instead, as an international player under 25 years old, he will only be paid a rookie salary his first year (\$545,000), plus the international bonus money available from the team with which he signed (approximately \$2.3 million). He will become eligible for larger increases likely after his second complete season and can file for free agency after 6 seasons, unless the Angels sign him to a long-term contract.

All 30 major league teams competed for the right to sign Ohtani. He expressed a desire to continue as both a hitter and a pitcher, and his agent asked for the teams' ideas for integrating this unusual two-way talent into a 162-game major league schedule. Ohtani narrowed the list to 7 teams and held a meeting with each. In the end, he settled on the Los Angeles Angels, who paid a \$20 million posting fee to Ohtani's Japanese team, the Nippon-Ham Fighters. “In the end, he felt a strong connection with the Angels and believes they can best help him reach his goals in Major League Baseball,” Ohtani's agent Nez Balelo of CAA Baseball said at the time of the signing.

After the first two weeks of the season, it looks like Shohei Ohtani made the right decision. As of April 10, according to Fangraphs, only 3 position players and one pitcher in the major leagues equaled Ohtani's combined value of 0.9 Wins Above Replacement (WAR), which measures a player's value to his team compared to an available minor league player added to a major league roster. Unique among all players, Ohtani's value is almost equally divided between his contribution to the team made by his hitting and his pitching.

FROM THE COMEBACK

Where does Shohei Ohtani go from here? Forecasting season stats for baseball's new sensation

Ohtani can't keep up his hot start both at the plate and on the mound...right?

Shohei Ohtani's first two weeks in the major leagues have gone about as well as anyone could have imagined. The 23-year-old Japanese star is 2-0 with a 2.08 ERA and *18 strikeouts in 13 innings*, while batting *.364/.417/.773 with three home runs in 22 at-bats*. In mere days, he has captured the attention and admiration of baseball fans and non-baseball fans alike.

But what now? Surely, Ohtani can't actually be one of the best hitters *and* pitchers in baseball... right?

We asked our writers to project what kind of numbers Ohtani will generate over the rest of the season. Here's what they came up with:

Alex Putterman: I'm trying as hard as I possibly can not to overreact to Ohtani's remarkable start. Coming into this season (at least before his awful Spring Training), the rap was that he was a sure thing as a pitcher and a question mark as a hitter. His fast start has provided proof of concept for his skills on both sides of the ball, but a few games shouldn't drastically change the projection.

With that in mind, I see Ohtani as an All-Star level pitcher but one who won't make enough starts to fully maximize his value on the mound. Maybe something like 140 innings over 24 starts with a 3.42 ERA and about a strikeout per inning. That would likely come out to about 3 WAR for the season.

At the plate, I'm more pessimistic, in part because I wonder whether the Angels will stick to the plan of DHing Ohtani three times a week once he starts picking up bumps and bruises and his performance slips either at the plate or on the mound. I'll say he posts a *.260/.320/.480* line with 18 home runs in 260 at-bats, which would make him an above-average hitter and (despite the positional adjustment for a DH) provide about 1.5 WAR of value.

Roll that together and you've got a 4.5 WAR player — a weapon more valuable than NL Rookie of the Year Cody Bellinger was last season. Pretty damn good.

Ian Casselberry: I already feel a bit dumb *for being dismissive of Ohtani* based on his spring training performance. I certainly bought into the idea that he had major adjustments to make with breaking balls and being pitched inside, that he might begin the season as only a pitcher with the Angels. Didn't take long to get that one wrong! Ohtani is flat-out hitting the ball hard. He's not just running into something he can hit.

However, Ohtani will probably be most valuable to the Angels as a pitcher. He has a four-pitch arsenal, can locate his fastball well and has what looks like a nasty out pitch with his split-finger.

I do think that pitchers could figure Ohtani out at some point, but that pitching repertoire could stick. I admit I'm kind of just throwing numbers out there, but a .270 average with a .840 OPS and 25 homers seem reasonable. On the pitching side, maybe 12 wins with an ERA under 4.00 (let's say 3.60), and more than 10 strikeouts (how about 11) per nine innings. Taking all of that into consideration, a WAR of 5.0 or above certainly appears to be attainable. Hell, that might be projecting too low!

Joe Lucia: I think Ohtani's success this season will be understandably limited by circumstances out of his control. Will the team manage to keep the six-man rotation alive? Will Ohtani still DH three days a week, or will injuries to the Angels offense force regular starters into the DH role? Will the lack of playing time stall momentum?

Despite all of that, I think he'll still end up as a four-win player this season, which is nothing to sneeze at and probably makes him the favorite for AL Rookie of the Year.

Andrew Bucholtz: There's a whole lot of uncertainty over just where Ohtani will wind up, especially on the batting front. The Ringer's Zach Kram *notes that* the Steamer projection system (which makes significant adjustments based on in-season data and considers Statcast data, especially exit velocity) estimates Ohtani will be a top-six pitcher and a top-25 hitter this year, and may post rookie seasons comparable to Kris Bryant and Noah Syndergaard. Other projection systems (PECOTA and ZiPS) aren't quite as bullish but are still quite high on Ohtani as a pitcher in particular.

However, I tend to lean more towards the conservative projections, to think Ohtani is more likely to excel long-term in his results from the mound versus his results at the plate, and to think his stats may trend down a bit as other MLB players become more used to him.

Still, his batting results so far have certainly been incredible, and it's hard to mark him down based on what we've seen to date (especially when you consider solid underlying numbers in batting exit velocity and pitching fastball velocity). I think we'll get Ohtani as an All-Star on the pitching side, as a top-25 pitcher by the end of the year, and as a top-100 hitter, and that all would be pretty amazing. But it's possible he could do even better than that.

FROM USA TODAY**Angels rookie Shohei Ohtani pushes for more playing time**

By Scott Gleeson

Los Angeles Angels rookie Shohei Ohtani, who has taken the baseball world by storm as a dual-threat pitcher and designated hitter, told reporters Wednesday he would "like to play more" as the season progresses.

Ohtani has started seven of the Angels' 13 games — two as a pitcher and five as a designated hitter — and is off to a hot start. He's 2-0 with a 2.08 ERA and batting .364 with three home runs. He's drawn comparisons to Babe Ruth, and his rookie baseball card has quadrupled in value in the last several weeks.

But he wants more.

"Once the season gets tougher and the schedule gets tougher throughout the summer, hopefully I can make them want to play me more," he said via his translator after a 7-2 win against the Rangers. "I would like to play more. If not, that's what it is. I have to follow what they have to say."

The Angels have been cautious, resting the 23-year-old on days after he pitches. He's slated to DH on Thursday and Friday against the Kansas City Royals.

"I talk to the medical staff every day, and they see how I'm doing, my strength level, to see if I can play that day," Ohtani told reporters.

Babe Ruth family on Angels' Shohei Ohtani: He's good, but 'a long way from being Babe'

By Josh Peter

Babe Ruth's grandson isn't ready to anoint Japanese sensation Shohei Ohtani the next Babe Ruth.

"He's a long way from being Babe," Tom Stevens, Ruth's only living grandson, told USA TODAY Sports. "But let's say he's doing things Ruthian."

Ohtani, a rookie with the Los Angeles Angels and the first major-leaguer to hit and pitch on a regular

basis since Ruth, is off to a torrid start. He hit home runs in three consecutive games at Angels Stadium, and he has been dominant on the mound in his first two starts.

Of Ohtani's two-way play, Ruth's grandson said, "Whether he's going to be able to keep that up, he seems to have the ability, which of course is the first thing. But even a youngster like himself, I'm not sure how long he can withstand the toll on his body. Babe certainly did it, but he only did it for a couple of years."

Ruth pitched and batted regularly from 1915 to 1919 before he focused on hitting and swatted 714 home runs.

Stevens said he welcomes the comparisons between Ohtani and his grandfather because it keeps Ruth's legacy alive. That certainly sounded like the sentiment of Stevens' mother — Ruth's 101-year-old daughter Julia Ruth Stevens — as she and her son drove for dinner in Henderson, Nev.

"I think it's terrific," Julia Ruth Stevens said. "It's wonderful for Japan and it's wonderful for baseball."

But the next Babe Ruth? Even though Julia Ruth Stevens said she hasn't seen Ohtani play, it's highly unlikely she'd make that pronouncement after watching the original Babe Ruth up close.

"He was one in a million," she said of her father.

FROM FANRAG SPORTS NETWORK

Heyman | Brilliant Ohtani has us all fooled

By Jon Heyman

How did the worst player in spring training become the best since the season began?

There are a lot of theories about how **Shohei Ohtani**, the dual star who was equally terrible at bat and on the mound in spring training (.107 batting average, 27.00 ERA), has been nothing short of brilliant since the games started counting.

How is this even possible?

Well first, it's obvious Ohtani is an immense talent, and clear why all the teams — particularly the seven finalists — were doing whatever they could to try to recruit him this winter.

But how could he have been so bad in Arizona? Was he just working on things like great veterans do? Or could it possibly have been a put on, some attempt to build drama for what's obviously now the story of the year? Angels GM Billy Eppler has a couple theories of his own.

One is that Ohtani was *"just getting acclimated to a new environment, a new culture."* The other is that results don't matter in spring, and that the Angels are simply just *"process based."*

Anyway, all those concerns from rival scouting (including some in this space) are out the window now. Whatever they were seeing is out gone.

Says one scout: *"I thought he was a top-of-the-rotation pitcher, but his bat and doing both has been a BIG surprise! Meanwhile, it's great for baseball."*

It's a boon to baseball, and a Godsend for the Angels. One rival GM, who surmises that Ohtani was just *"messing around"* in spring, marvels at his extraordinary talents. Actually, everyone is now.

One scout said that as a pitcher he may have the best pitch in the game (his splitter) and the second best (his fastball), and also that he is reminiscent of Pedro Martinez, Dwight Gooden and Jose Fernandez in their heydays, and maybe only a few others.

"He's got big talent, and a strong degree of athleticism," Eppler says.

Others suggest the Angels are to be commended for breaking him in just right, with two games against the young A's. But Eppler demurs, saying that was *"not premeditated,"* and that *"you can't manipulate the schedule out of the gate."*

The reality, according to the rival GM, is that no one would have hit Ohtani the way he was throwing the ball, especially in that second game, in which he took a perfect game into the seventh. The talent is actually freakish when you considering the hitting, as well. He hit threw balls 100-plus mph in one recent game, and hit three 100 mph-plus in another. And he became the first player since "Grunting Jim" Shaw for the 1919 Senators to have three homers and two wins in his team's first 12 games. Grunting Jim also fooled folks, as he wound up with only four career home runs.

Ohtani, meanwhile, looks like he will be a dominant figure in this league for years to come.

FROM SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

Shohei Ohtani wants the Angels to play him more often

By Dan Gartland

Two-way star Shohei Ohtani has only played in eight of the Angels' first 13 games, and he's hoping that trend will change.

Ohtani, who went 1-for-3 with an RBI in Wednesday's win over the Rangers, said after the game that he hopes to be in the lineup more often.

"It's the beginning of the season, so I think they are being pretty careful with me right now," Ohtani told reporters through a translator. "Once the season gets tougher and the schedule gets tougher throughout the summer, hopefully I can make them want to play me more. I would like to play more. If not, that's what it is. I have to follow what they have to say."

The Angels' current plan for Ohtani is to have him pitch once a week (typically on Sundays) and bat as the DH in most other games. He will typically be rested on the days before and after he pitches, to limit the strain on his body.

Ohtani is giving the team plenty of reasons to increase his workload, though. In 24 plate appearances thus far, he has a .364 batting average with three homers and eight runs driven in. As a pitcher, he took a perfect game into the seventh inning last weekend against the A's and has a 2.08 ERA in two starts.

Ohtani's arrival and insertion into the DH role has forced 38-year-old Albert Pujols, who only played 34 games in the field over the past two seasons, to play first base on a regular basis. On days when Ohtani does not hit, Pujols has moved to DH and the Angels have played Luis Valbuena or Jefry Marte at first.

FROM BLEACHER REPORT

Shohei Ohtani on playing time with Angels: 'I would like to play more'

By Tim Daniels

Los Angeles Angels dual-threat sensation Shohei Ohtani said Wednesday he'd like to receive more consistent playing time.

Ohtani, who's shined as both a starting pitcher and designated hitter during the early stages of his rookie season, has been left out of the lineup on the days before and after he pitches.

"It's the beginning of the season, so I think they are being pretty careful with me right now," he told reporters via a translator. "Once the season gets tougher and the schedule gets tougher throughout the summer, hopefully I can make them want to play me more. I would like to play more. If not, that's what it is. I have to follow what they have to say."

Ohtani has posted a .364/.417/.773 triple-slash line with three home runs in six games as a hitter. He's compiled a 2.08 ERA and 0.46 WHIP with 18 strikeouts in 13 innings across two starts as a pitcher.

The 23-year-old Japanese superstar also said Wednesday he meets with the Angels' medical team daily to determine whether he should be in the lineup.

In February, manager Mike Scioscia said pitching would be the focus for Ohtani's first year, per Jerry Crasnick of ESPN.com.

"He's going to get the most looks as a pitcher," Scioscia said. "If he can pitch to his capabilities, that will always influence your team more than what he would do hitting. But that's not to say he won't have a chance to be a difference-maker on the offensive end, too."

Given that stance and the three-time Nippon Professional Baseball All-Star's early success, it's unlikely the Angels will mess with the formula for resting him. That's especially true since the team has raced out to a 10-3 record.

Scioscia and the front office could be forced to make some tough decisions during the second half of the season if Los Angeles is in the heat of a playoff race, though. It would be difficult to leave Ohtani's bat out of the lineup for about half the team's games down the stretch.